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My life's contrasts

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

My Life's Contrasts

By

Doreen Long

Date: May 12, 1988

APPROVALS

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Date: May 16, 1988

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INTRODUCTION

"My Life's Contrasts" is a body of work which depicts the thoughts of my personal inner and outer worlds, based upon my life's experiences and my research. To depict the contrasts in my life involves risk taking, but the risks I have taken is the only way to express the feelings of my inner world. In doing my Thesis work I found that by taking risks I discovered the solution for bringing my inner world into the outer world through experimentation and a search for my self awareness. The search for self awareness and delving into my subconscious became almost as exciting as the creating of my work.

A poem written by John Davis, 1979, best expresses my journey into my subconscious. (1)

FLY MY SOUL

Turned free	into
Fluttering for the moment	the depth of darkness,
Hanging free	I
and afraid	stretched my arms
and alone	to accept
My soul plunged	the caress
in a decent to the abyss	of
	the end,
Plunging	And found I could fly!
ever deeper,	
ever faster	full and high
ever farther,	and free!

My heart did soar
and again rejoice
in the sight
of the sun
and the light
of
the world

the pit
the abyss
had become
the instrument

of my salvation

the measure
of my joy
the pinnacles of delight,
the heights of ecstasy
in my soul
have no reference
but to
the depths
of my despair.

INFLUENCES

In my search for self awareness and my subconscious it was inevitable that I would have to think about pain and death as well as the meaning of life. To think about pain and death involves risk taking because these are not pleasurable things to contemplate, thus pain and death holds power over me. I had to risk thinking about death in order to free myself from the fear of dying. In the book Medicine Woman a quote stands out which clarified many thoughts about pain and death for me, "Accept your death and become dangerous. I cannot stop you from dying! A dangerous woman can do anything because she will do anything. A powerful woman will do the unthinkable because the unthinkable belongs to her. Everything belongs to her, and anything is possible. She can track her vision and kill it by making it

come true". (2) Through analyzing this statement I found that death was not fearful but rather challenging and useful in my creative process, especially by tracking the vision of my inner world and making it come true,

Carl Jung has showed me more clearly than another artist (whose work I admire) could, why I have the need to create and also what I create. It is more important for me to understand my need to create than to make pretty pictures.

I have endured many trials and tribulations in my life but nothing, not even love or pain has given me myself as much as the search for the meaning in my work. The meaning in my life's contrasts has sent me on a journey that exposed my spirit and the depths of my humanity. I have found many parallels in Jung's experience and my own; e.g., Jung had the wonderful gift of analysis of his own experiences that gave him his greatest insights.

I've had experiences similar to Jung's experiences with deliria and hallucinations. These experiences began in 1976 when the constant pain that encumbers my body began and has never left me. It took four years to diagnose my illness by that time my life was forever changed because

I am to remain an invalid for the rest of my life. It was during this time that I had the experiences with deliria which has helped me to find the culmination of my artistic endeavors. In 1982 I had a serious operation, a spinal fusion which involved the rebuilding of my lower spine. I had informed my doctors of my intolerance for drugs but they ignored my information and gave me massive doses of medications which they felt would ease my pain and prevent infection which could be fatal. It was a no win situation because if I didn't have the antibiotics I could die but on the other hand the antibiotics could kill me. After I began hallucination all drugs were removed and I suffered a great deal. The memory of these unconscious experiences has remained vividly in my conscious.

Jung said, "One of the greatest difficulties for me lay in dealing with my negative feelings. For as long as we do not understand their meaning, such fantasies are a diabolical mixture of the sublime and the ridiculous. In order to grasp the fantasies which were stirring in me "underground", I knew I had to plummet down into them, as it were. I felt not only violent resistance to this but a distinct fear. For I was afraid of losing command of myself." (3) I found in creating my paintings that my greatest difficulty lay in exposing my negative feelings and my deepest fears which I like Jung had experienced through hallucinations after my spinal

fusion. I too had plummeted down into the "underground". I remembered all of these hallucinations and after some time I reflected upon my journey and realized that imbedded in my subconscious were the depths of my fears which were concerned with death and religion. My conscious mind would never have accepted these fears but through these unsolicited dreams, over which I had no control, came a clearer understanding of fear and death. The improbable thing, to me, was that I allowed myself to recognize these fears, it gave me a great feeling of freedom and the knowledge that my life would be forever changed.

I have allowed myself the risk of expressing these hidden "underground" fantasies to be revealed in my paintings by the use of color and materials which to me have become symbols of my inner life or my very soul. The use of color in my work can be described as a psychological and physiological experience because colors carry strong expression which is widely believed to be based on association, for example red is said to be exciting because it reminds us of fire, blood, pain, revolution, etc. Green calls up the refreshing thought of nature, and blue is cooling like water. The effect of color according to Rudolf Arnheim is much too direct and spontaneous to be only the product of an interpretation attached to the

precept by learning. Thus, in my opinion I use color as my own personal and physiological interpretation suggests that I use them. It appears to me to be a sensory response rather than a learned response although without knowing it I may use both. The same principle applies to the use of texture in my work, it is a physiological response that the senses perceive that allows me to use these symbols of my inner world.

Jung has helped me realize or rationalize my use of collage as a vehicle to represent my inner world and the use of archetypes in Jung's writings has clarified my beliefs. Jung's definition of archetype is as follows:

The concept of the archetype...is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain definite motifs which crop up everywhere. We meet these same motifs in the fantasies, dreams, delira and delusions of individuals living today. These typical images and associations are what Jung calls archetypal ideas. The more vivid they are, the more they will be coloured by particularly strong feeling - tones...they impress, influence and fascinate us. They have their origin in the archetype, which in itself is an irrepresentable, unconscious, *pre-existent* form that seems to be

part of the *inherited* structure of the psyche and can, therefore, manifest itself spontaneously anywhere, at any time. Because of its instinctual nature , the archetype underlies the feeling - toned complexes and shares their autonomy. (Civilization In Transition, C.W. 10, par. 847) (4)

Jung states "Again and again I encounter the mistaken notion that an archetype is determined in regard to its content. It is necessary to point out once more that archetypes are not determined as regards to their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A *primordial image* is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience. Its form, however....might perhaps be compared to the axial system of a crystal, which as it were, preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own. This first appears according to the specified way in which the ions and molecules aggregate. The archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, a possibility of representation which is given a priori. The representation themselves are not inherited, only the form, and in

that respect they correspond in every way to the instincts, which are also determined in form only. The existence of the instincts can no more be proved than the existence of the archetypes, so long as they do not manifest themselves concretely.(5)

It appears to me that from my painting of the "Primordial Image #1", I have represented a concrete image of the nonrepresentable which came from my unconscious through my deliria or hallucinations. Therefore, it is my belief that even though I cannot prove that my painting came directly from a concrete form, it may be possible that the *primordial image* was derived from the irrepresentable, unconscious pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the archetype. This is the rationale of the kind of paintings I do that express my inner self through paint and materials such as in my contrast series of "Sharp and Soft", "Fire and Ice" and "Silk and Iron", which depict an unrepresentable feeling - tones or formless concept of what I feel to be the contrasts that exist in each and every human. I know this to be true from my own direct experiences. It has been my desire to make these

formless concepts into a concrete form that is hopefully recognizable to my audience.

Many of my paintings depict formless fears as well as the concrete evidence of what my physical body has endured. Thus I make paintings that represent pain and the feeling of being trapped or bound within my body. Through my work on concrete images I can translate these subjective feelings to reality for everyone to see if they are so inclined.

An interesting aside was that Jung said, "Since I did not understand the dream image, I painted it in order to impress it upon my memory." He goes on to say, "That there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life." (6) It appears to me that it would be impossible to produce on demand something in your psyche but Jung by the act of painting did produce something from his psyche. I feel that most of my paintings which are labeled intuitive are indeed a great deal more than that, they are images, emotions, etc., that I produce from my own psyche.

Jung states that his involvement in his work which he felt involved things, "which neither I nor anyone else could understand, was an extreme loneliness. I was going about laden with thoughts of which I could speak to no one, they would only have been misunderstood. I felt the gulf between the external world and the interior world of images

in its most painful form. I could not yet see the interaction of both worlds which I now understand. I say only an irreconcilable contradiction between "inner and outer" (7)

I have found that I too felt that my external world and internal worlds were inexpressible until I began to paint, that is when the magic occurred. I am still misunderstood a good deal of the time but now that I understand what compels me to create my inner world I have begun to be understood by some of my colleagues, my closest associates, and my family, I feel the freedom to keep exploring my concepts.

It is my belief that Jung's work for me is a standard by which I can express myself by putting on canvas what may have been buried deep within me for all time. It is a marvelous awakening and it combines the occidental need to have meaning in the world and the oriental meaning in man or within oneself or without oneself. It is the culmination of my search for meaning in my work and meaning in my self.

Many artists have interpreted their inner worlds especially notable were the surrealists. From its inception, surrealism in painting took two directions. The first, represented by Miro, Andre Masson, and later Matta, is sometimes call organic surrealism. In this tendency automatism, "dictation of thought without control of the mind," is predominant, and the results are generally close to abstraction, although some degree of imagery is normally present. The origins of this wing, of

which I am most interested, were in the experiments in chance and automatism carried on by the dadists and earlier by certain futurists; the effects, particularly those sought by the automatic writing of the surrealist poets.

The other direction is associated with Pierre Roy, Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, Rene Magritte and Paul Delvaux. It presents recognizable scenes and objects taken out of natural context, distorted and combined in fantastic ways as they might be in dreams. This wing of surrealism attempts to use the images of the subconscious, defined by Freud as uncontrolled by conscious reason.

Out of the organic surrealism of Miro and Masson, and the concepts of automatism and intuitive painting, have emerged later works of abstract expressionism and abstract styles in the twentieth century. Andre Masson especially exemplified my experiences because of the time period he lived in. He was a man of violent convictions who had been deeply scarred, spiritually even more than physically, by his war experiences. Wounded almost to the point of death, he was long hospitalized. After partially recovering, his rages against the insanity of man and society led to his confinement for a while in a mental hospital. Masson was by nature an anarchist, his convictions fortified by his experiences; his belief that the rational must be dominated by the irrational did not come by any rational process. His works about 1925 directly expressed his

emotion and contained various images having to do with the sadism of man and the brutality of all living things. Just as in my contrast series, Masson and his bitter pessimism showed a passionate hope, through painting, to be able to find and express the mysterious unity of the universe hinted at in primitive myths and religions.

Picasso in his surrealist sculpture and his collage very often used found objects, things which had a previous life before their introduction into an art context. These objects or materials were often juxtaposed in an uncommonnnn, humorous or startling way. For example, when Picasso first made collage - he cut out three pieces of wallpaper, which looked like wood, and pasted them to the surface of the picture . They are irregular rectangles, not representing anything by their shape, but only by their notational identity as wooden objects. At this point their was a dramatic shift from one of refinement in painting to one of intent. This was emphasized by the typically Cubist paradox that combined materials - bits of worthless things, rags, newspapers, wrapping papers - with a haughty exploration of the nature of pictorial art. Picasso delighted in the use of collage because it gave him the freedom to use punning references, a real oddness - a peculiar deviation from the normal.

I found a delight as well in using discarded materials such as fur and barbed - wire, broken glass, silk and handmade papers which gave me

references to my inner emotional experiences. It was like using a metaphor to describe the undecipherable. I used instead materials and paint as references to my inner world. The art world has learned greatly from Picasso's use of collage and his surrealist sculpture, his deviation from the normal shifted art from the unknown to the known.

Another source of influence and reinforcement for my search I found in Kahuna Healing. Huna is a Hawaiian word meaning, "That which is hidden or not obvious," sometimes we call it the Hidden Knowledge, or the Secret Reality. The idea is that not anyone purposely hid it away, but only that it is usually hard to see." (8) According to scientific research in many fields the societies of Polynesia, where the Kahunas originated, were every bit as complex as our own: their moral, ethical and legal codes as stringent; their philosophies, art and literature as rich; and their science as skilled. Polynesia is a term applied equally to a geographical area and to a people who share a common historical, linguistic, cultural and physical background ,it was from these peoples that kahuna healing was developed.

Kahunas also use metaphors in a similar way to explain the different aspects of the concepts they teach. Following are some of the metaphors used by Hawaiian kahunas to describe the effects and actions of three prime factors of imaginative thought, energy or power, and

matter THOUGHTS - bundles, clusters, seeds, nets, webs, any piercing instruments, clubs, sprouts, and young animals, fishes and flowers.

POWER - water rain, mist and fog, waves and swells, fire, food, branches or limbs, and colors. (especially red) MATTER-(etheric) a bridge an arch or arc, a rainbow, a cave or cavern, rope, thread or cord, shadows, and embryo, joints of the body, hooks and clouds. With such symbolism the Kahunas are able to teach their concepts in a way that can easily relate to the natural world. (9)

The Kahunas liken the role of the Higher Self to that of a teacher and a creative artist. As a teacher, it is considered to be the source of all knowledge of which you might ever need or desire. You have access to the knowledge of what to do to achieve a given end and how to do it. This knowledge may be presented through dreams, visions, inspiration, hunches, or through contacts which you have with peoples and objects in the physical world. This becomes possible by altering your states of awareness. A Kahuna - like technique for this using specific symbols, by saying, "There is a wise teacher within her, her spiritual self who already knows her problem, her crisis, her perplexity. The purpose of

contact with one's Higher Self is the practical one of "increased creativity, of increased ability to give of one's self to some chosen field." (10) The summary given above agrees with my own belief, of the use of creativity to bring forth my inner world. I have experienced the altered states of awareness and recognized the deepest parts of my being and hopefully I have depicted this awareness in my work.

PROCESS

In this study, experimentation in using a combination of physical materials and paint has been carried out, an understanding of my use of them became relevant for my work and to me personally.

First it became necessary for me to find materials that personified my contrasts, e.g., silk and iron, in which case it was apparent that I would have to use some kind of silk and iron. I used thirty to forty year old silk, which had the look and feel I was searching for in my silk and I used the copper wire that Fred Meyer used. I primed a canvas with gesso on which I first glued the silk as a background, then I placed the iron pieces to form a configuration that exemplified the trapped or confined feeling I needed to depict. I then began to manipulate the materials,

including a silver shawl, the design was intuitively pleasing to me. After I glued the iron pieces and the shawl on the silk I was ready to paint. The silk was a shade of yellow that was too harsh, therefore, I painted all of the silk a silver color to complement the silver colored shawl. The paint consisted of an iridescent silver pigment which I mixed with a prepared painting medium. I used both a brush and a pouring method.

My paintings consist of a series of events that occur when I layer the paint. I used copper iridescent in a pattern that reflected the iron design. I also used small touches of blue, copper and yellow to enhance the surface of the painting. At one stage near the conclusion of the painting I decided to add more silk to make the piece more dimensional. I first painted both sides of the silk silver because I wanted to entwine the silk between the iron pieces. After the additional silk was applied I dripped additional copper color on it to give the piece continuity. I later added much more barbed wire to give it added strength.

I use a similar process in most of my paintings, however, a

different approach is used when I use fur: e.g., my large blue-gray painting with persian lamb fur. I began with the fur which is a sumptuous curly gray, white and bluish gray material. After I ripped the coat apart I found that each pelt was only a few inches long and that the back of the pelts were dyed a lovely blue-gray. I decided to use the blue-gray as my back ground color. I needed an intermediary material to bridge the flat painted background and the fur, I found that the use of Cellucloy was the best solution, it not only gave me the texture I wanted but it enabled me to adhere the fur to the canvas even more successfully than just glue would. After placing the fur in appropriate places with the Cellucloy I painted gesso on the Cellucloy and when it was dry (in several days) I was ready to paint. I used a combination of prussian, cobalt and cerulean blue with white and raw umber to achieve the blue-gray tone I was seeking. This painting process was done in layering as in the silk piece. After the base had dried I added a copper iridescent paint over the surface. I did this with both brush and pouring as in my other paintings. I added touches of purple, reds, and oranges in the painting to give it a few intense places of vivid color. This vivid color

gives me the feeling – tone of pain. At this point I was ready to add the barbed wire, which I painted copper with acrylic paint. I sewed the barbed wire over the fur to exemplify the soft and sharp contrasts I was seeking to depict.

In my straw and gold piece I used an entirely different process, first I made paper out of straw. After cooking and emulsifying the straw into a workable solution, I used the mold and deckle to form my individual pieces of paper and allowed them to dry. I kept some of the straw in its cooked form before I emulsified it and allowed it to dry. I then applied gesso on an unstretched canvas and applied the paper and straw pieces with glue, in a fan like primitive configuration. I stained the straw with clear medium in an oriental, calligraphic random way. I then added gold leaf to depict the contrast of a simple everyday material of straw to the precious gold. I also used a gold pearl pigment added to medium to show the contrast of the gold leaf and the poured processed manufactured gold.

From my reading I have discovered that the materials I use for my concepts are very important because fur for example becomes a symbol of softness and vulnerability while barbed wire becomes a symbol for the trapped feelings and the confined world I live in. Thus, the materials I

find or make, like my handmade paper or masks become a way of depicting my inner world and my outer world. The process becomes the most important aspect of my work because during the process I feel I am making not just a picture but an extension of myself.

DISCUSSION OF THESIS PAINTINGS

My Thesis work had been evolving from my unconscious slowly and after working on my paintings and readings, including Japanese writings and poetry, I began to understand where I would begin to put my work together. The beginnings became clear when I thought in traditional, mythological oriental concepts, first I thought of "Fire and Ice". The question arises: Why did "Fire and Ice", characterize so clearly the answers I was seeking? I realized that "Fire and Ice" depicted how my feelings can range from cold as ice to hot as fire. There is not one that is stronger than the other and I saw the need for the ice to cool the fire but not to put it out. This concept can be compared to the Yin and Yang concepts used by the Chinese for thousands of years. Thus, the first painting in my Thesis was my first "Fire and Ice" This painting was a rather small painting because I was afraid my concept wouldn't be clear to the viewer. The finished painting pleased me but I felt it didn't have enough fire in it. The second "Fire and Ice" I felt had the proper balance. The next oriental concept I chose to represent was "Silk and Iron". The old traditional Chinese thought is that a person should be as soft as silk yet as strong as iron. The origin of the concept silk and iron may be

considered traditional because there is no concrete source readily available to explain where this concept was derived. It is one that found its way from China to Japan during the cultural borrowing of the Japanese from the Chinese during the seventh and eighth centuries A.D. This concept pleased me because I know that these qualities are within all of us. In one of my readings called Iron and Silk by Mark Salzman, he describes the martial arts he was learning; In the West, Chinese martial arts are called "kung fu" or "gong fu", but the word gong fu actually means skill that transcends mere surface beauty. A martial artist whose technique is decorative but without power "has no "gong fu", Whereas, say, a calligrapher whose work is not pretty to look at but reflects a strong austere taste certainly "has gong fu" (11) This concept awakened an awareness of my inner self and I felt that "Silk and Iron" would be my next collage.. The first one had very old silk and iron on it along with some calligraphy. I was very satisfied with the results but I needed to experiment more, hence the more dimensional piece which emphasizes the silk more, yet the iron holds the silk in its place. The silk and iron holds the same quality of one not being stronger than the other as in "Fire and Ice"

From these two concepts the ideas began to flow. The third painting became "Soft and Sharp", in which I used fur and thorns to depict the contrasts. The first painting was very successful but I had many failures before I was able to culminate my soft and sharp concepts because the materials and the paint needed to be compatible in order to depict my message. Finally three paintings I felt were successful are included in my Thesis.

Papermaking had become a viable material for me to use because it not only gave me texture but it was a material derived from nature. I made straw paper and from a fairy tale came the concept of turning straw into gold. I know that is impossible but not the contrast of two materials from nature, straw is not highly valued but gold is, thus my contrast. The making of this collage became more than a depiction of a sharp contrast, rather it became a primordial image because the image evoked a feeling - tone of an indescribable thing which looked very primitive.

The next concept I undertook was a much more personal one, that of pleasure and pain. Before my life became one of constant pain I did indeed have a great deal of pleasure in my life, therefore, I didn't want to

only depict pain but rather to show the contrast between pleasure and pain. This was a difficult task: How do you convey two such opposite concepts? I decided to create a surface that depicted beauty and was pleasurable to behold but underneath coming in and out of this beautiful surface is a sharp wire that wounds me deeply.

I continued experimenting with the pleasure - pain concept but my next painting became something else, it was deeper and darker, it didn't have as much pleasure and pain as the first painting. When the painting was completed I saw the contrasts, they were my outer world hidden and revealed, thus this painting became itself.

After exploring my concepts I began to understand my need for deeper understanding of my inner world. My most recent collages came about quickly as if all the others were only the preliminary work for my "Primordial Image". It began with fur and sharp pointed stake like sticks which would show my strength and vulnerability at the same time. The same thing happened as in my "Straw and Gold" piece, it became more than a contrast of materials, it became a profound primordial image that relates to me in a significant way. This image depicts both my inner

world and my outer world. The fur is a symbol of my softness,
vulnerability and my soul. The stakes became what binds me unkindly
through my painful body, a trap from which I cannot escape.

EPILOGUE

My journey into my inner world has been the most revealing of my life because I began with a little concept of "Fire and Ice" and I ended my journey with a depiction of myself that I never would have consciously had the courage to do.

The metaphor that comes to mind is like the unfolding of a lovely flower, you have to appreciate every petal that unfolds for each has its own beauty and the last petal that opens is the culmination of the experience. My experience has been profoundly rewarding and most importantly it has given me the key to take many more journeys into my inner and outer worlds and to know the difference. This culminating experience is not the end but only the beginning.

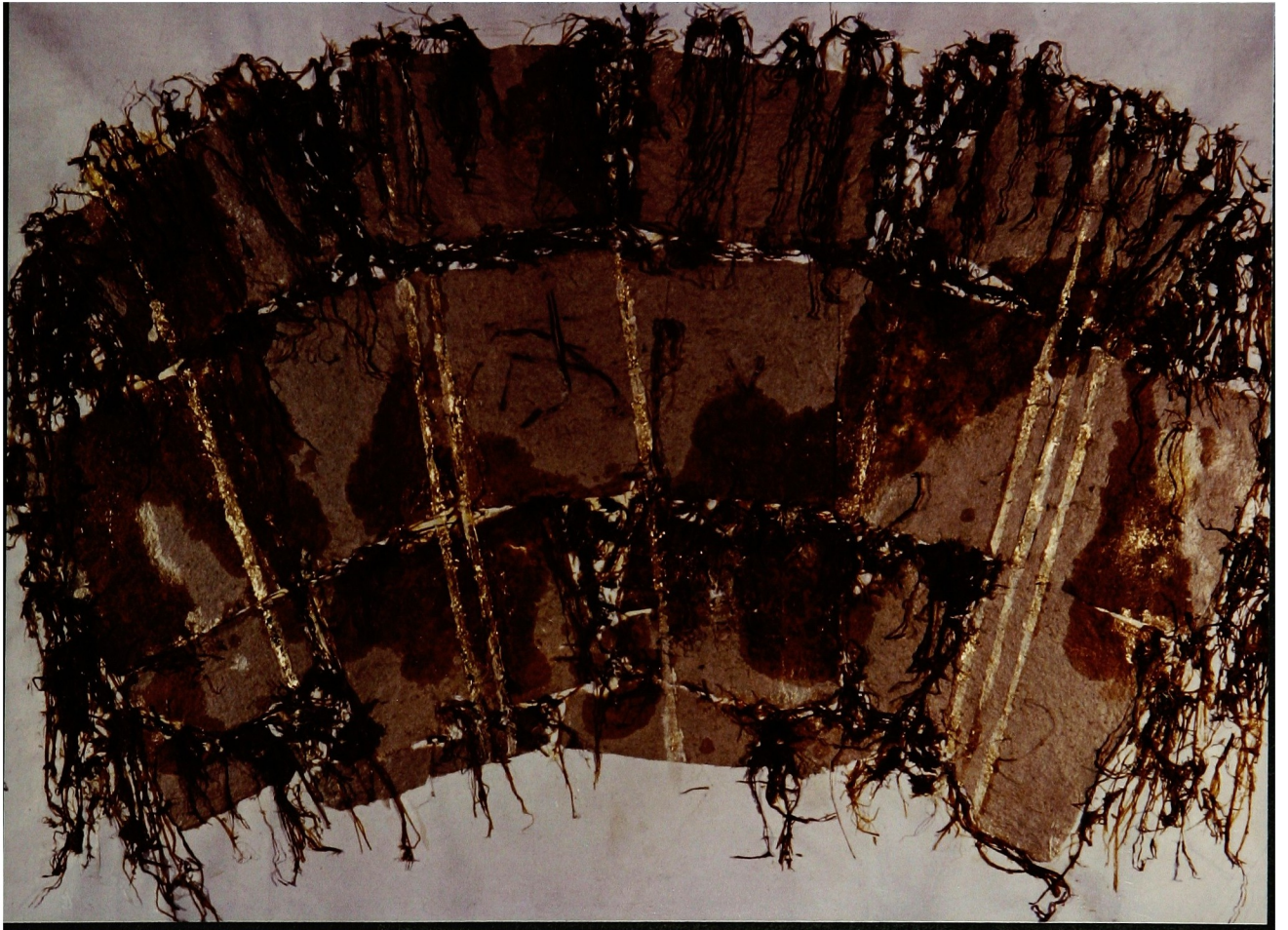
ILLUSTRATIONS

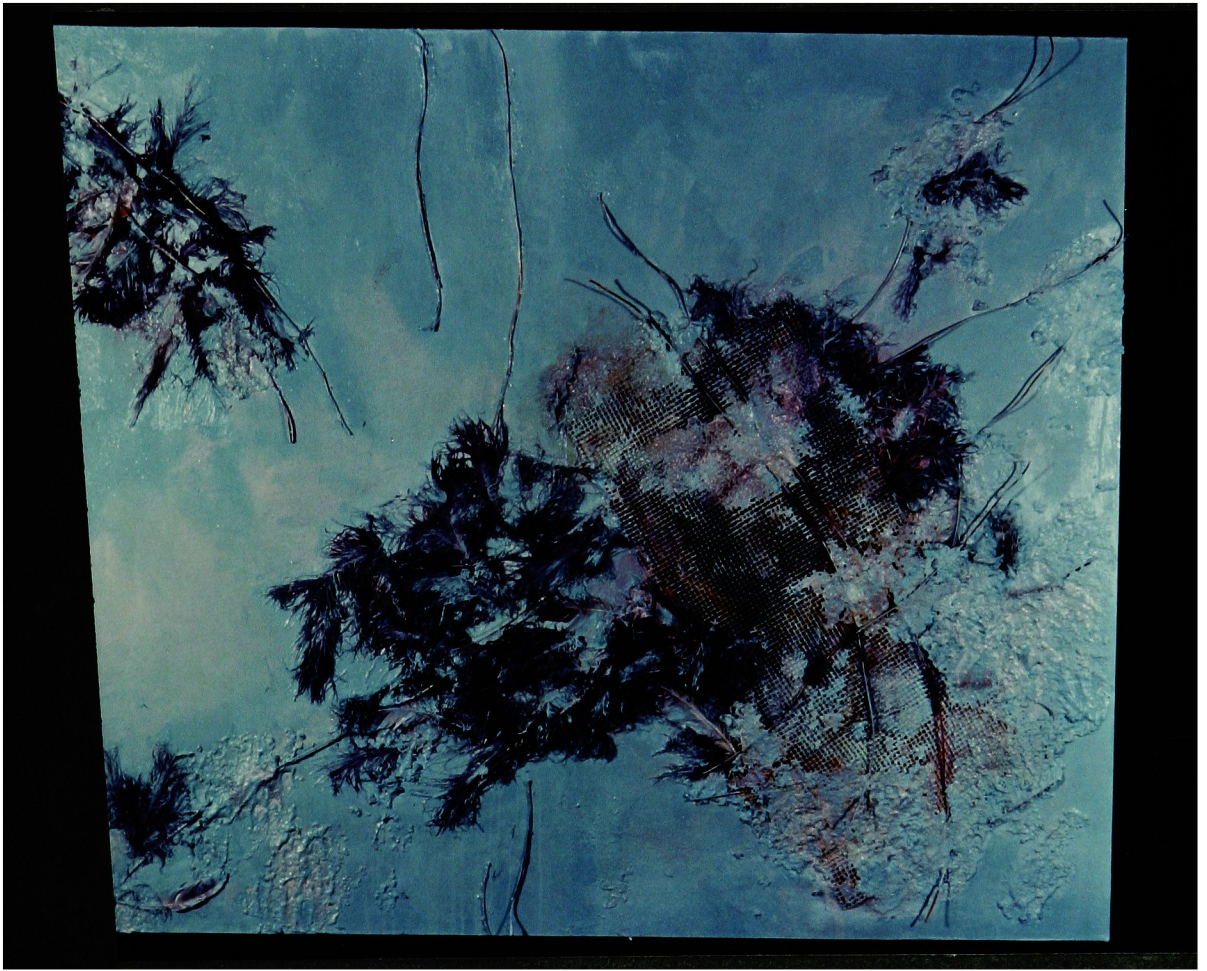
Fire and Ice #1, Fire and Ice #2, Silk & Iron #1, Silk & Iron #2.....pg.	29.
Soft and Sharp #1 (Orange), Soft and Sharp #2 (Black).....pg.	30.
Soft and Sharp #3 (grey and copper).....pg.	31.
Straw and Gold.....pg.	32.
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Pain & Pleasure #1, Pain & Pleasure #2.....pg.	34.
Primordial Image #1, Primordial Image #2.....pg.	35.

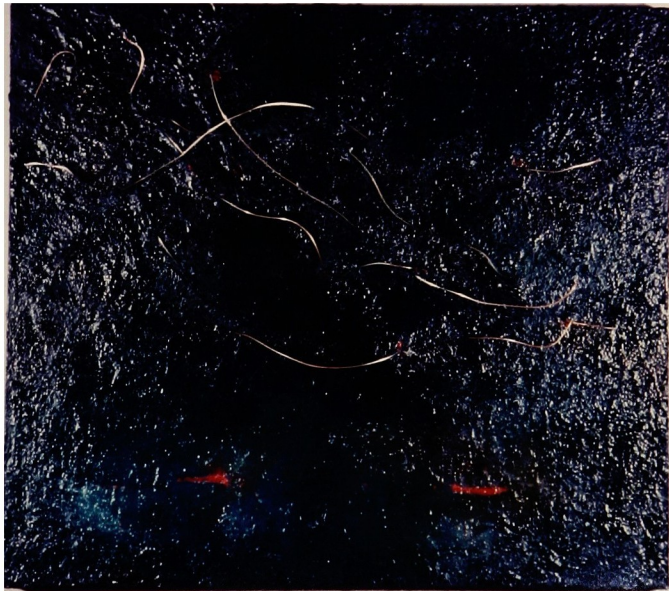


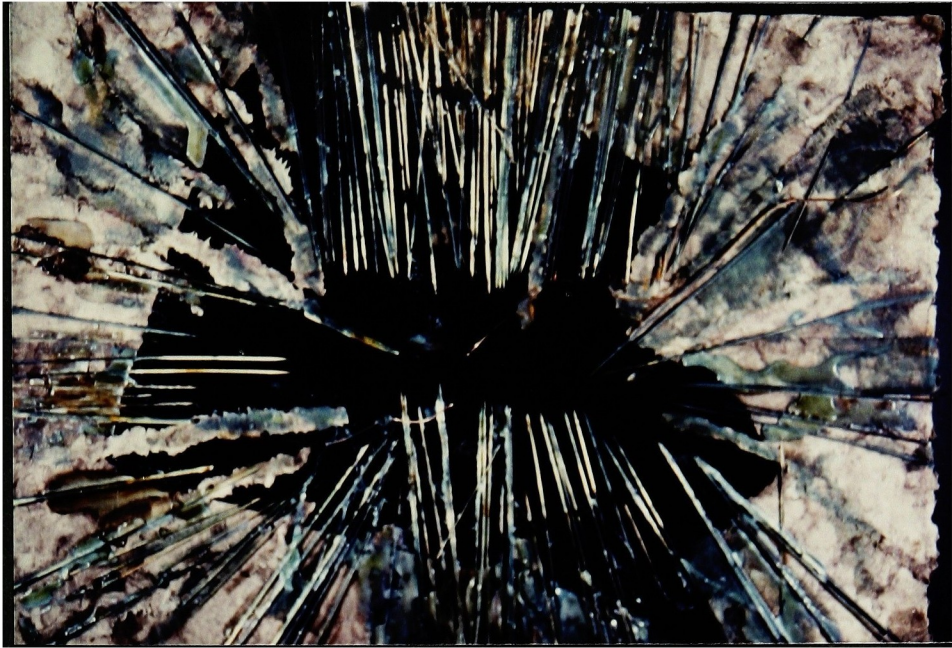












FOOTNOTES

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